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28 November 1986

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: Meeting with NASA Administrator Fletcher


1. At my lunch with Jim Fletcher a couple of weeks ago, he raised his concern over the possibility of a major Soviet space initiative in 1992 -- the 75th anniversary of the Revolution -- that might have a dramatic impact comparable to Sputnik in 1957. He is principally concerned about the Soviet lead over the US in establishing a space station and their experience in long endurance in space. He believes it is a very real possibility that the Soviets will attempt to send a manned mission to Mars at that time. He is wondering what the US might do that would be comparable and would somehow offset such a Soviet achievement in popular perceptions.

2. I had the impression that he is increasingly convinced that the US may have made a strategic mistake in going forward with the space shuttle instead of a space station which clearly provides the necessary intermediate stage for interplanetary flight. We talked about the enormous scope of the Soviet space program and particularly their lead in development of a heavy lift launch vehicle.

3. We talked about a possible space initiative by the United States for the early 1990's (he pointed out that 1992 also is the 500th anniversary of Columbus) and he said we could not beat the Soviets to Mars -- at best we could only tie them, and only that with a huge expenditure of money. I told him off the top of my head that one initiative with both tremendous scientific and strategic significance might be the establishment of a permanent American base on the moon. He was intrigued about that.

4. He was especially concerned to insure that the President receive a briefing on the Soviet space program, which he has been working out with Larry Gershwin.

5. Fletcher feels he has no patron or even a willing ear at the White House, especially on the domestic side. I believe he has come to us both for substantive help and also for our help in sounding an alarm at the White House that decisions on next steps in space, especially if we intend to do anything special in the early 1990's, need to be taken soon.

  
Robert M. Gates

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